

Gary Goforth's preliminary comments based on a cursory review.

1. Overall the deviation appears to include several good aspects, including
 - a. it recognizes the public health issues associated with discharging harmful algal blooms (HABs) from Lake Okeechobee to the estuaries,
 - b. it recognizes the Corps' responsibility to operate the lake to minimize human health impacts associated with HABs, and
 - c. it recognizes the associated environmental and economic issues of releasing Lake water containing HABs, and
 - d. it attempts to restrict flows to estuaries to no more than existing conditions (LORS2008).
2. However,
 - a. An operational deviation of this impact should have a public review and comment period. What is missing is the detailed operations – as written it gives tremendous flexibility to the Corps without prior public review and comment.
 - b. The proposed deviation should prohibit discharges to the estuaries anytime HABs are present at S-308 or S-79.
 - c. The proposed deviation ignores the need to reduce inflows to Lake Okeechobee during conditions that require regulatory discharges. For example, during the 2018-2019 dry season, almost 1 billion gallons of water entered the Lake through the Corps' structure Lake Culvert 10A on the L-8 Canal. Suggest that operations to reduce inflows be developed with the SFWMD, including minimizing inflows at the Corps structure LC-10A.
3. Section 6d – south operations
 - a. Sending water south should be the primary operation during the deviation. Only when south flows are ***impossible*** should lake water be sent to the estuaries.
 - b. Additional volumes should be sent south if human health advisories have been issued for either of the estuaries and not south of the lake.
 - c. Operations for human health should be prioritized above operations for the Cape Sable Seaside sparrow, and the deviation should remove all restrictions to southern flows during these periods of human health crises.
 - d. All FEBs and STA treatment cells should be operated at full flow-through capacity during these periods.
 - e. The Holey Land and Rotenberger Wildlife Management Areas should be fully utilized to move water during these periods. Extant restrictions to flow, e.g., undersized outflow structures in

these wildlife management areas, should be identified and resolved.

4. Section 6e – releases to tide

- a. discharges to the east should ***always*** occur in pulse releases to minimize adverse impacts to estuarine fauna and flora.
- b. releases should be minimized during oyster spawning season.
- c. basin runoff from C-44 Basin should be sent into the lake to the maximum extent practical.
- d. What is the calculus for setting the maximum rate of 730 cfs to the St Lucie Estuary? The Corps should use a 200 cfs daily maximum instead of increasing to 730 cfs without technical justification.
- e. The deviation should require the SFWMD to monitor and report sediment load from the lake to the estuaries, in addition to phosphorus and nitrogen, during these operations. The SFWMD should develop an after action report that would summarize the pollution loading and include impacts to oysters and seagrasses.
- f. The operation plan for the C-44 RSTA should be developed ASAP and prioritize the capture and treatment of Lake Okeechobee releases if an HAB is present.
- g. The “St. Lucie Estuary” is defined by the SFWMD as the water body from Roosevelt Bridge to the Indian River Lagoon. This definition does not include the South Fork and North Fork of the St. Lucie Estuary, important bodies of water that are adversely impacts by discharges of polluted Lake water. Suggest the deviation clarify that references to the “St. Lucie Estuary” include the South Fork and North Fork as well.